

COURTHOUSE PLACE

(FORMERLY COOK COUNTY CRIMINAL COURTS BUILDING)

54 West Hubbard Street
Chicago, Illinois

Preliminary Staff Summary of Information
Submitted to the Commission on Chicago Landmarks August, 1988

COURTHOUSE PLACE
54 West Hubbard Street
Chicago, Illinois

Architect: Otto H. Matz

Completed: 1893

Courthouse Place, the former Cook County Criminal Courts building, is a monumental edifice that served as an imposing symbol of county and city government for over ninety years. Designed by Otto H. Matz and completed in November, 1893, it is the third governmental building to occupy the site at the northwest corner of Dearborn and Hubbard streets. North Market Hall, a combination market and police station built in 1851, was the first governmental structure to occupy the site. The second building on the site, the Criminal Courthouse, was the location of the trial resulting from the world-famous Haymarket Affair of 1886. The Former Cook County Criminal Courts Building is an excellent example of a Romanesque style governmental building, popular across the United States from the 1880s through the turn of the century. The design of this courthouse was directly influenced by the Allegheny County (Pennsylvania) Courthouse and Jail designed by Henry H. Richardson, the renowned architect whose personal interpretation of the Romanesque style has come to be known as Richardsonian Romanesque.

The Early History of the Site

The first governmental building the City built for its own use was a two-story, brick and stone Market Building, constructed in 1848 on State Street just north of Randolph. Designed by John Mills Van Osdel, Chicago's first architect, the Market Building had stalls on the first floor for a public market, and on the second floor a library, clerk's office, and rooms for the Common Council (equivalent to today's City Council). Within a few years, this arrangement proved unsatisfactory as the small town began growing to the south, and boat traffic on the busy Chicago River impeded travel to the market from the North and West sides of the city. A decision was made to divide the city into four districts, each with

the power to levy a tax to support a municipal market. In addition to the original State Street Hall, a market was opened in 1851 to serve the South Division of the city at Market (now Franklin) and Washington streets; another was erected at Hubbard and Dearborn streets (North Market Hall) to serve the North Side; and a fourth opened for West Siders at Randolph and Halsted streets. Laws were created to enforce strict regulations in these markets, with a ten-dollar fine each time a farmer or retailer cheated on weight or quality. Market managers were empowered to verify the scales, mediate disputes, and lease stalls to the highest bidders.

Market Street and State Street exchanges both closed by the mid-1850s after their customers moved to other parts of the city. Shortly after they closed, an informal open-air market developed on South Water Street at the river's edge. Meanwhile, the Randolph Street Market became a "haymarket," where Chicagoans bought food for their animals. North Market Hall, the last official market on the North Side, shared its facilities after 1866 with a precinct police station. North Market Hall was destroyed in the Chicago Fire of 1871.

By the 1870s, Chicago had grown into a major metropolis with more than 300,000 citizens. After the fire, it became a center of reconstruction as both homes and business establishments were rebuilt. With the destruction of North Market Hall in the fire and the increase in the population of Cook County a new larger county courthouse was proposed. The Criminal Courthouse and County Jail was designed by John M. Armstrong and James J. Egan and completed in 1874. The jail was built behind the courthouse, facing Dearborn Street.

The Haymarket Affair of 1886

The Criminal Courthouse and County Jail was the location of the trial resulting from the Haymarket Affair of 1886. The first of May in 1886 was the beginning of a major movement by union members to force employers to obey the eight-hour-day law that had been passed by the Illinois General Assembly in 1867. Over 80,000 union members took part in planned strikes and protest marches in Chicago. The most important of these demonstrations came to be known as the Haymarket Tragedy. During this outdoor public meeting at Halsted and Randolph streets, a skirmish broke out between policemen and workers. During the confusion that followed, a bomb was thrown by an unknown person, killing a policeman and a civilian. A total of fourteen people died and twenty-two were injured during the riot. Eight men were arrested: George Engel, Samuel Fiedlen, Adolph Fischer, Louis Lingg, Oscar Neebe, A.B. Parsons, Michael Schwab, and August Spies. They were charged with murder, tried, and found guilty. Spies, Fischer, Engle, and Parsons were hanged in the courtyard between the courthouse and the jail on November 11, 1887. Schwab, Fielden, and Lingg had their sentences changed to life imprisonment and were later pardoned. Lingg died in his jail cell, from a mysterious bomb immediately after the trial. The labor movement viewed the Haymarket Affair as the culmination of years of suppression and injustice inflicted on the workers by their employers without regard for established labor laws. The workers had united to demand their basic freedoms of assembly and speech; protection by the law from political corruption, police surveillance, and brutality; and the right to organize unions.

The Design of Courthouse Place

In 1890, the population of Cook County had reached over one million. A larger courthouse and jail were needed to serve this large population. The Criminal Courthouse was demolished in 1892, and replaced by the present Romanesque style Cook County Criminal Courts Building, designed by Cook County Architect Otto H. Matz and completed in 1893. Matz was undoubtedly influenced in his design of the building by two structures designed by H.H. Richardson that had recently been completed in Chicago: the Marshall Field Wholesale Store, (completed in 1885 and demolished in 1930) and the John J. Glessner House (completed in 1886 and designated a Chicago Landmark on October 14, 1970). Both buildings exemplify the characteristics of Richardson's distinctive interpretation of the Romanesque style: solidity and powerful massing, broad arched entrances and arched windows which are deeply recessed and arranged in a ribbon-like fashion, and a monolithic scale. The heavy masonry characteristic of the style has a rugged rock-faced finish. Richardson himself had employed the style in the design of a courthouse and jail for Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, which was completed in Pittsburgh in 1884. The Romanesque style of this courthouse became a popular one for courthouse design during the next two decades. This style with its powerful massing, represented a sense of solidity and portrayed the symbolic significance of the courthouse in local government. Over a hundred courthouses of varied Richardsonian Romanesque design are still in use in many states in the Northeast, Midwest, and Southwest.

The six-story building that is now known as Courthouse Place occupies the northwest corner of Hubbard and Dearborn streets, with the main facade and arched entrance facing Hubbard Street. The east, south, and west facades are entirely faced in rusticated Bedford limestone. The entrance to the structure is highlighted by a large decorative arch resting on clusters of short columns with deeply-carved capitals. Spandrels containing two female figures representing Law and Justice enrich the detail of the arched entrance. The basement and first floor windows are arranged in groups of three and four at regular intervals across three sides of the structure. A stringcourse runs horizontally above the arched entrance and the windows of the first floor. The main portion of the building is simple in design with the window pattern of the lower floors repeating itself. The fourth floor windows are accented with an arcade of stone arches as are the sixth floor windows and those in the tower which forms a seventh floor. This tower protrudes from the facade of the upper central portion of the building, directly above the entrance. Tourelles (turret-like decorative elements) frame either side of the tower, and are also attached to the four corners of the building. There is a decorative balcony across the bottom of the tower and a balustrade and segmental pediment at the top of the structure. The entry lobby has a double marble staircase with brass hand-rails and iron balusters and newel posts. The form and detail of the iron work are picturesque and exhibit characteristics of the Art Nouveau style. American marble was used as wainscoting in the ground and first floor.

The Architect

Otto H. Matz was born in 1830 in Berlin, Germany. He arrived in Chicago in 1853 and

secured a job in the engineer corps of the Illinois Central Railroad. In 1854, at the age of 24, Matz became the architect for the railroad. In 1856, he prepared plans and supervised construction of the first passenger terminal of the Illinois Central in Chicago, known as the Central Depot, the most prominent building in Chicago at the time. Freight houses, roundhouses, and shops for the railroad were also designed by Matz and constructed along the 700 miles of Illinois Central railroad track. Matz opened his own architectural firm in 1857. With the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, Matz was appointed assistant engineer in the U.S. Army. He worked with generals Fremont, Halleck, and Grant preparing topographical surveys and military defenses. When he was attached to General Grant's command, he worked on the Vicksburg campaign and attained the rank of major. Upon his return to Chicago, he resumed his architectural career. In 1868, the Chicago Board of Education appointed him architect of the Chicago public schools, although he also continued his private practice. The Nixon and Doggett buildings were private commissions designed by Matz in 1871 and completed in 1872. Other commissions include the Alexian Brothers Hospital, Chicago Hospital for Women and Children, numerous business blocks, and private residences. Matz also entered the competition for the Cook County Courthouse and City Hall, held in 1874, in which fifty-four architects participated. Although he won the \$5,000 first prize for his design, the commission was awarded to James J. Egan because of a dispute between the City of Chicago and the Cook County board members. By 1892, Matz was highly regarded for his public buildings and he was appointed Cook County Architect in which capacity he designed the Cook County Criminal Courts Building. Matz was a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects. He died in Chicago on March 8, 1919, at the age of eighty-nine.

Later History of Courthouse Place

Courthouse Place was the setting of the play "*Front Page*" by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, written in 1928 and produced in film versions in 1931 and 1974. The building continued as a courthouse until 1929 when the criminal courts moved to a facility at 2600 South California Avenue. After remaining vacant for ten years, a renovation was undertaken in 1939 under the Works Progress Administration. Shortly thereafter, the Chicago Board of Health and the civil service examining services relocated in the building. The Board of Health left in 1960. The jail behind the building, built in 1893, was razed in 1936. A modern firehouse was built on this site in 1970. From the 1960s to 1985, the building was used by numerous City of Chicago and Cook County agencies for an assortment of governmental functions. The City sold the building in 1985 to a developer whose extensive renovation created modern office spaces in a sensitively restored historic environment. Of particular note in the renovation were the cleaning and repair of the facade and the lobby restoration, which included rebuilding the original configuration of the dual staircase and the surprise discovery and replication of the original stencil pattern.

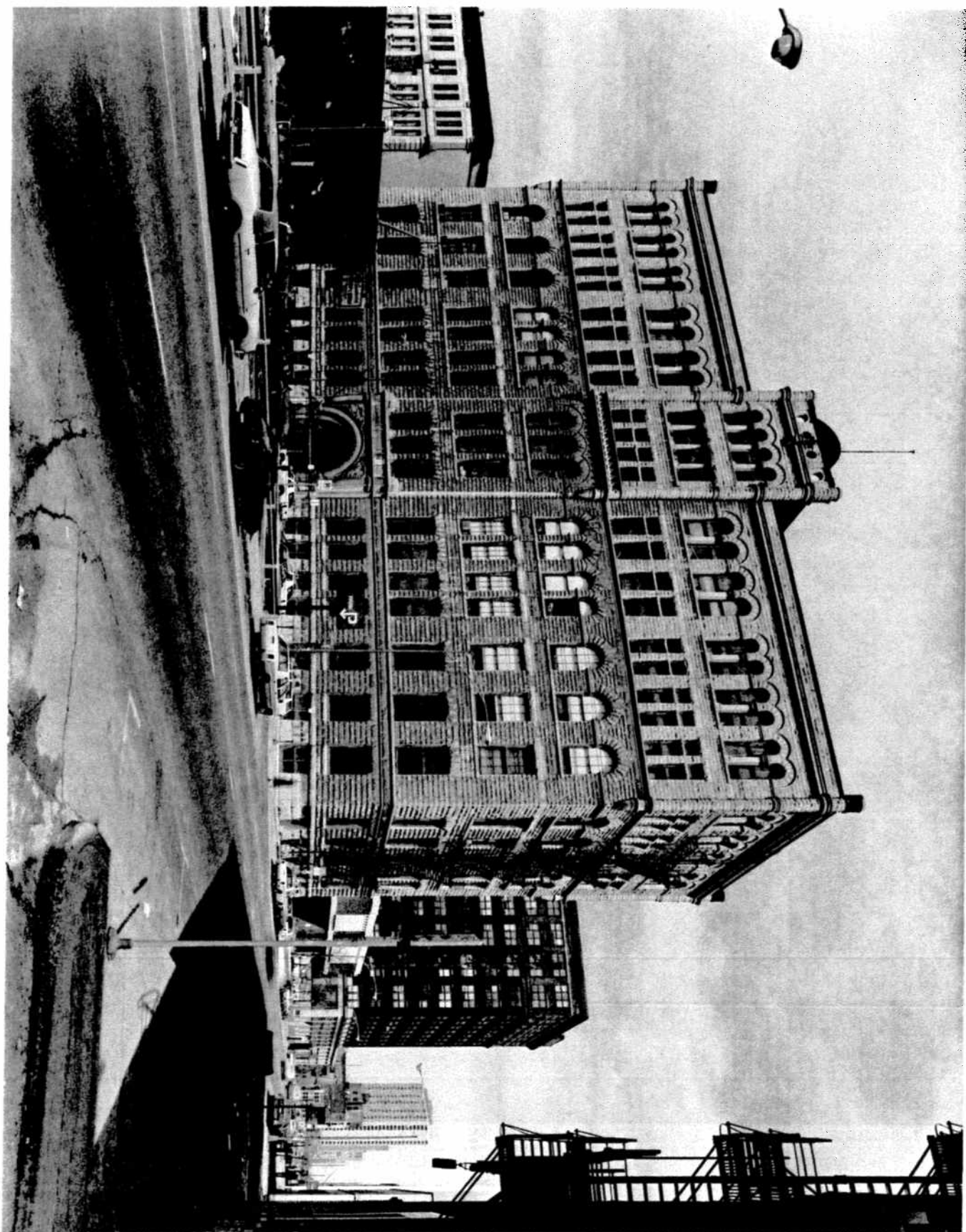
For over 130 years, the 54 West Hubbard site, which contained first North Market Hall, then the Criminal Courthouse, and finally the former Cook County Criminal Courts Building, has played an important role in the history of Chicago, Cook County, and the United States. The events that occurred on this site coincide with the rapid growth of the City of Chicago and Cook County. Few Romanesque Revival buildings remain in Chicago

today. The former Cook County Criminal Courts Building is similar to Burnham and Root's 1885 Rookery Building (designated a Chicago Landmark in 1972). The Rookery, as a speculative commercial structure, is much more elaborately detailed than the publically-funded Courthouse Place building, but they are similiar in overall form and elevation. Courthouse Place is an excellent example of a governmental building in the Romanesque style. Its design makes Courthouse Place a prominent physical feature of the city, occupying a site that is associated with important events in the history of the governance, labor movement, and architecture of Chicago and Cook County.

OPPOSITE:

Courthouse Place is an excellent example of a Romanesque style governmental building.

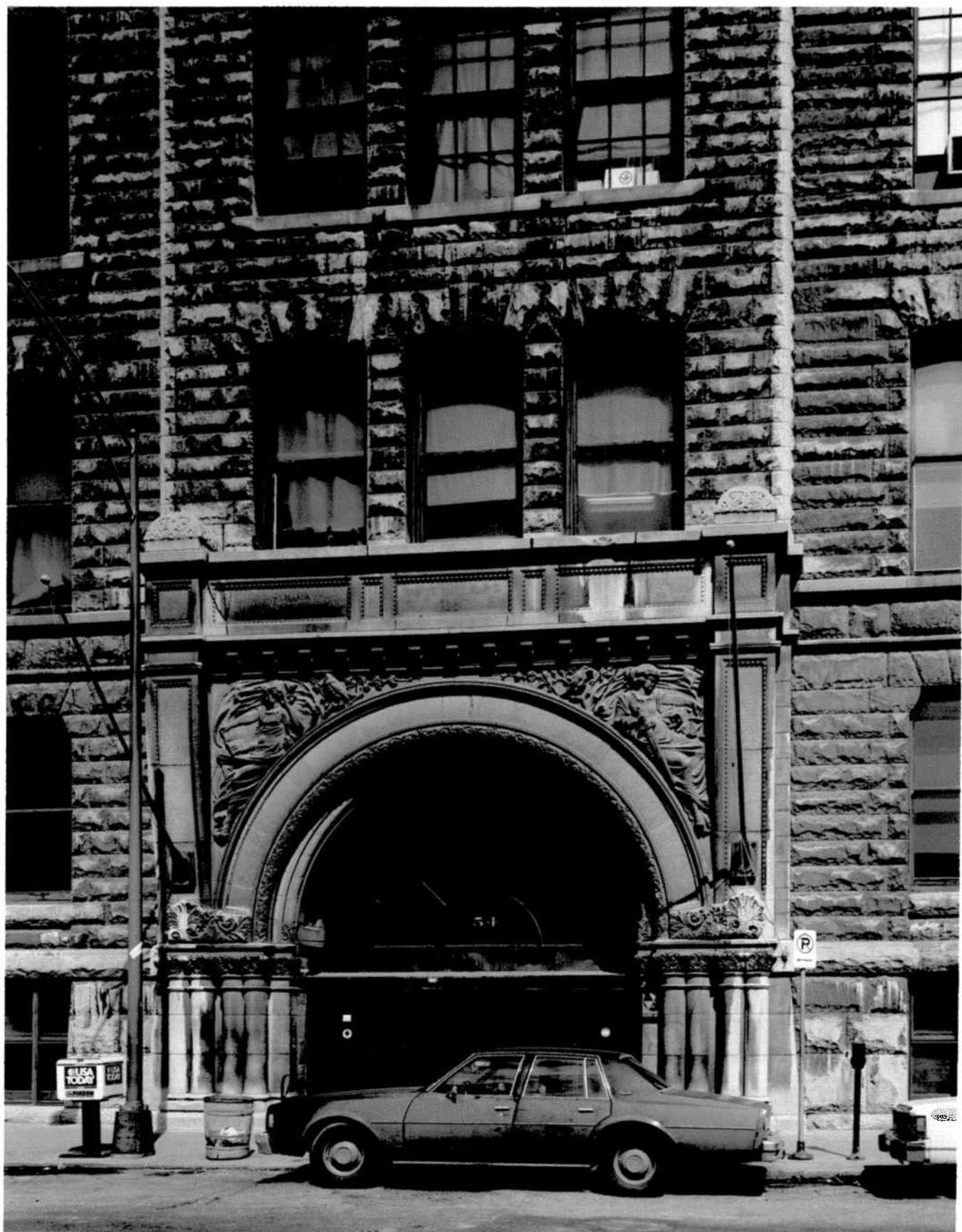
(Bob Thall, photographer)



OPPOSITE:

The arched entrance contains representations of Law, on the left with an open book, and Justice, to the right holding a sword.

(Bob Thall, photographer)



OPPOSITE:

The form and detail of the lobby staircase iron work exhibits characteristics of the Art Nouveau style. In the recent renovation of the building, this staircase was returned to its original configuration as two separate flights of steps.

(Bob Tall, phototgrapher)



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Additional research material used in the preparation of this report is on file at the office of the Commission on Chicago Landmarks and is available to the public.

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The Commission on Chicago Landmarks was established in 1968 by city ordinance, and was given the responsibility of recommending to the City Council that specific landmarks be preserved and protected by law. The ordinance states that the Commission, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor, can recommend any area, building, structure, work of art, or other object that has sufficient historical, community, or aesthetic value. Once the City Council acts on the Commission's recommendation and designates a Chicago Landmark, the ordinance provides for the preservation, protection, enhancement, rehabilitation, and perpetuation of that landmark. The Commission assists by carefully reviewing all applications for building permits pertaining to the designated Chicago Landmarks. This insures that any proposed alteration does not detract from the qualities that caused the landmark to be designated.

The Commission makes its recommendations to the City Council only after extensive study. This preliminary summary of information has been prepared by the Commission staff and was submitted to the Commission when it initiated consideration of the historical and architectural qualities of this potential landmark.



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